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Democrats face worsening legal environment on redistricting

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI
Associated Press

After New York state's top court this week crushed Democratic hopes of coming out ahead in this decade's redistricting cycle, the party faces an increasingly precarious legal environment in the hyper-partisan battle over drawing legislative lines.

New York's Court of Appeals on Wednesday overturned a map that Democrats muscled through the state legislature there, deciding that a nonpartisan expert will instead draw the lines for the state's 26 congressional districts. It was at least the fifth time this cycle a state court has ruled that maps drawn by its state legislature were too partisan, with a Democratic map in Maryland also falling and Republican-drawn ones in Kansas, North Carolina and Ohio being tossed out as well.

Still, Republicans are favored to win state Supreme Court races in North Carolina and Ohio in November that'd enable those GOP-controlled legislatures to implement more partisan maps before 2024.



The Manhattan skyline is seen from the observatory of the Empire State Building in New York City on Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022. Associated Press


In contrast, the 4-3 New York decision came from a court appointed entirely by Democrats, a party that now finds itself bound to a bipartisan process written

into the state's constitution. "Democratic judges are not really as inclined to excuse extreme partisan gerrymandering as Republican ones are," said Lak-

shya Jain, a lecturer at the University of California-Berkeley who writes on redistricting at the website Split Ticket. "Democrats for a long time have been push-

ing for redistricting reform and anti-gerrymandering legislation," Jain noted, and that seeps into their judges' preferences.




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Continued from Front

The biggest test of this potential legal asymmetry comes in Florida, where Democrats and civil rights groups are challenging a congressional map that Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis pushed through the GOP-controlled legislature there. Legislators had initially balked at the map, which aggressively favors their party, because it dismantles two plurality-Black districts in possible violation of the state's Fair Districts Amendment, which requires lawmakers to draw districts that let racial and linguistic minorities pick their chosen representatives.

Republicans insist they've followed the law in Florida, though many legal experts disagree.

"This is not a difficult legal question," said Douglas Spencer, a law professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder. "It would be a complete abdication of the rule of law if they take the most gerrymandered map in American history and let it stand."

Spencer said he's optimistic Florida's state supreme court will ultimately strike down the map but notes he's in a minority among redistricting experts. That's because six of the seven members of the state supreme court were appointed by Republican governors.

Democrats began the once-a-decade redistricting cycle anxiously, with Republicans in control of drawing vastly more congressional seats. That's due



Florida state Sen. Shevrin Jones, at podium, speaks against congressional maps alongside local and state lawmakers, Monday, April 18, 2022, at the Little Haiti Cultural Center in Miami.

Associated Press

to a combination of GOP success in state elections and that Democrats' reform push has led them to cede line-drawing power to independent commissions in states they control, like Colorado.

But Democrats were relatively successful, shifting the typical House seat close to President Joe Biden's five-point margin of victory in 2020. Until the end of the New York and Florida litigation, it's impossible to precisely evaluate how the party did, but it's likely the map will still lean more toward Democrats than after 2010, when Republicans used their statehouse dominance to try to lock in a House majority through partisan maps. But much of Democrats' gains came in New York, the most popu-

lous state where the party controlled line-drawing and one where it stood to net as many as four House seats in its partisan map.

The recent flurry of state court actions are due to a legal ruling at the tail end of the last redistricting cycle. In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority ruled that federal courts have no role in policing partisan gerrymanders, or maps drawn explicitly to benefit one party by contorting lines to capture enough of its voters to reliably win elections.

That kicked redistricting litigation into state courts. "State courts have in a lot of ways been the hero this cycle," said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Social Justice, which argues against gerrymandering

and for redistricting reform. But Li noted state courts have vulnerabilities that the federal system doesn't have. The composition of many state courts change from election to election, making rulings in places like North Carolina and Ohio dependent on which-ever party has the political winds at its back in November. State courts are also uneven — in some states such as New York they aggressively strike down gerrymanders, while in places like Texas, the state supreme court is so conservative that civil rights groups have routinely not even bothered to ask it for help, instead going to federal courts to challenge maps drawn by the GOP-controlled legislature in recent decades.

There's even more uncertainty over the legal landscape of redistricting this cycle because the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court has indicated it may rewrite the rules that govern the drawing of legislative districts. In February, conservatives on the court said they may revise the standards on how to draw districts that comply with the Voting Right Act's requirement that minorities get a chance to choose their own representatives and are not simply scattered among voters of other races. And in March, four conservative justices indicated they wanted to consider Republican lawyers' arguments that only state legislatures — and not state courts — have the say in drawing congressional maps.

Still, redistricting reformers said they remain heartened by how courts performed in this cycle so far. Suzanne Almeida of Common Cause, a frequent litigant opposing gerrymanders, noted that courts in Republican states like Ohio have joined ones in deep Democratic states like New York in striking down partisan maps.

"If I ran the world," Almeida said, there'd be national standards against gerrymandering to ensure skewed maps in one big state don't tilt the entire congressional map. But a Democratic proposal for just that foundered in Congress earlier this year. So, Almeida said, "we are taking the wins that we can take." □



President Joe Biden speaks about the war in Ukraine in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, Thursday, April 28, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thurs-

Biden taking 'hard look' at student loan forgiveness

day that he's "taking a hard look" at canceling additional federal student loan debt and will reach a decision within a month.

"I am considering dealing with some debt reduction," Biden told reporters in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

The comments came days after Biden had a private meeting with Democratic lawmakers who pressed him on the issue. One of the lawmakers, Rep. Tony

Cardenas, D-Calif., said afterwards that Biden disclosed he was exploring the possibility.

However, Biden signaled in his Thursday remarks that he wouldn't go as far as some activists want, saying \$50,000 in debt forgiveness was not under consideration. He did not give a number for what he was considering.

"I'm in the process of taking a hard look at whether or not there will be additional

debt forgiveness," he said. "And I'll have an answer on that in the next couple of weeks." During his campaign, Biden said he wanted to "immediately cancel" at least \$10,000 in student debt per person. So far he's repeatedly extended a pause on requiring borrowers to repay their loans, a moratorium that was put in place under then-President Donald Trump near the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. □

16 states that want to electrify USPS fleet file lawsuits

By DAVID SHARP

California and 15 states that want the U.S. Postal Service to electrify its mail delivery vehicles are suing to halt purchases of thousands of gas-powered trucks as the agency modernizes its delivery fleet.

Three separate lawsuits, filed by the states and environmental groups Thursday in New York and California, ask judges to order a more thorough environmental review before the Postal Service moves forward with the next-generation delivery vehicle program.

Plaintiffs contend that purchases of fossil fuel-powered delivery vehicles will cause environmental harm for decades to come.

"Louis DeJoy's gas-guzzling fleet guarantees decades of pollution with every postcard and package," said Scott Hochberg, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, referring to the postmaster general.

Attorneys general from 16 states — 14 of which have Democratic governors — sued in San Francisco. A separate lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice,



A United States Postal Service employee works outside a post office in Wheeling, Ill., Dec. 3, 2021. Associated Press

CleanAirNow KC and Sierra Club was filed in the same venue. Another was filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council and United Auto Workers in New York.

All of three of them target the environmental review underpinning the Postal Service's planned purchase of up to 165,000 next-generation delivery vehicles over the next decade.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said it's key to stop the process before it's too late.

"Once this purchase goes through, we'll be stuck with more than 100,000 new gas-guzzling vehicles on neighborhood streets, serving homes across our state and across the country, for the next 30 years. There won't be a reset button," he said. The Postal Service

defended the process it followed under DeJoy, a wealthy former logistics executive and Republican donor who was appointed by a board of governors controlled by then-President Donald Trump.

"The Postal Service conducted a robust and thorough review and fully complied with all of our obligations under (the National Environmental Policy Act),"

spokesperson Kim Frum said Thursday in an email.

The Postal Service contract calls for 10% of the new vehicles to be electric but the Postal Service contends more electric vehicles can be purchased based on financial outlook and strategic considerations.

The percentage of battery-electric vehicles was doubled — to 20% — in the initial \$2.98 billion order for 50,000 vehicles.

Environmental advocates contend the Postal Service's environmental review was inadequate and flawed, and that the contract represented a missed opportunity to electrify the fleet and reduce emissions.

The review process "was so rickety and riddled with error that it failed to meet the basic standards of the National Environmental Policy Act," said Adrian Martinez, senior attorney on Earthjustice's Right to Zero campaign. New York Attorney General Letitia James said the Postal Service used "fatally flawed decision-making" that led to an outcome that was "fiscally and environmentally irresponsible." □

Chauvin appeals murder conviction for killing George Floyd

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin is appealing his conviction for murder in the killing of George Floyd, arguing that jurors were intimidated by the protests that followed and prejudiced by heavy pretrial publicity.

Chauvin asked the Minnesota Court of Appeals in a court filing Monday to reverse his conviction, reverse and remand for a new trial in a new venue, or order a resentencing.

Last June, Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill sentenced Chauvin to 22 1/2 years in prison after jurors found him guilty of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter.

Floyd died on May 25, 2020, after Chauvin pinned the Black man to the ground with his knee on his neck

for 9 minutes, 29 seconds. Floyd had been accused of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a convenience store. Three other fired officers face state trial this summer after being convicted in federal court earlier this year of violating Floyd's civil rights.

Chauvin's attorney, William Mohrman, laid out a number of challenges to his conviction, including that the trial should not have been held in Hennepin County, where Floyd was killed.

"The overwhelming media coverage exposed the jurors — literally every day — to news demonizing Chauvin and glorifying Floyd which was more than sufficient to presume prejudice," the brief said.

In the months that followed Floyd's killing, protesters took to the streets in Min-

neapolis and around the country to protest police brutality and racism. Some of that unrest was violent.

Mohrman said several potential jurors expressed concerns during jury selection that if Chauvin was acquitted they would fear for their personal safety and worried about more violence. He said several of them said they were intimidated by the security measures implemented at the courthouse to protect trial participants from protesters. The filing also cited the fatal shooting of Daunte Wright by a police officer in nearby Brooklyn Center that sparked more protests during Chauvin's trial. It says jurors should have been sequestered after selection to avoid being prejudiced by reports of that slaying. It also cited a \$27 million settlement reached be-



Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin addresses the court as Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill presides over his sentencing in Minneapolis on June 25, 2021. Associated Press

tween the city and Floyd's family that was announced during jury selection, saying the timing of that prejudiced jurors in the case.

Mohrman cited several instances of alleged prosecutorial misconduct, claiming untimely sharing of evidence, failure to disclose

and document dumping by the government.

The filing also says the judge did not apply the sentencing guidelines correctly and should not have included "abuse of a position of authority" as an aggravating sentencing factor for the former police officer. □

California subpoenas ExxonMobil in probe of plastics waste

By **DON THOMPSON**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) —

California's attorney general on Thursday subpoenaed ExxonMobil as part of what he called a first-of-its-kind broader investigation into the petroleum industry for its alleged role in causing a global plastic pollution crisis.

Attorney General Rob Bonta said the industry for decades has encouraged the development and use of petroleum-based plastic products while seeking to minimize public understanding that their widespread use harms the environment and public health. "Every week, we consume the equivalent of a credit cards worth of plastic through the water we drink, the food we eat, and the air we breathe," he said, citing a 2019 study for the World Wide Fund For Nature environmental group. Bonta will consider whether petrochemical companies violated the law with what he called their "historic and ongoing efforts to deceive the public." Bonta said ExxonMobil was subpoenaed as a major source of global plastics pollution and for its alleged prominent role in public deception regarding plastics.

ExxonMobil and the Western Plastics Association did not immediately comment, and the Western States Petroleum Association declined comment.

But the American Chemistry Council representing plastics makers issued a statement saying that U.S. "plastic makers are committed to a more sustainable future and have proposed comprehensive and



Cans and plastic bottles brought in for recycling fill containers at a recycling center in Sacramento, Calif., July 5, 2016.

Associated Press

bold actions at the state, federal, and international levels."

Initiatives the industry group said it supports include requiring all plastic packaging in the U.S. by 2030 to include at least 30% recycled plastic; making producers responsible for packaging to help increase recycling; and supporting a legally binding global agreement to confront the problem.

But Bonta said the industry appears to have engaged in "greenwashing" for decades by leading consumers to believe that plastics were environmentally friendly — largely because they can be recycled. That marketing effort made "people comfortable to consume more and purchase more plastic," he said. "And that is really the heart of the deception that we're going to investigate."

Companies may have violated laws barring unfair competition, deceptive business practices, or making "greenwashing" illegal, Bonta said.

A civil lawsuit could potentially seek fines or damages, but Bonta said his main goal is a legal order or a settlement requiring companies to clean up plastic waste, make plastics manufacturing changes and promote "non-deceptive ways of talking about plastics."

"We're really looking at the underlying issue of non-recyclability, essentially, of plastics, and that is a major problem," Bonta said. "And we're investigating whether that was fueled by a decades-old campaign of deception."

There is no timeline for the completion of the investigation, but Bonta said it is

proceeding "with a level of urgency."

Bonta's move comes amid growing awareness of the pervasiveness of discarded plastics and the role of "microplastic" waste in the food chain.

Scientists are still studying the extent and human harm from tiny bits of broken-down plastic, some so small that they are invisible to the naked eye.

The National Academy of Sciences said in December that the United States — the world's top plastics waste producer — should reduce its plastics production because so much winds up in the ocean and other waterways.

Like Bonta, the scientists have said that recycling won't solve the problem. Most plastic cannot be recycled and overall recycling rates have never

exceeded 9%, said Bonta. The rest is incinerated, put into landfills or escapes into the environment.

California is among states that have struggled to encourage recycling against market headwinds and to sort out products that can readily be reused.

California banned single-use plastic bags and is discouraging the use of drinking straws, plastic utensils and condiment packages. The Los Angeles City Council this week approved 14 measures further restricting the use of plastic bags, utensils and containers at city properties and events. Los Angeles County supervisors last week restricted single-use plastic products. California spends about \$500 million each year to clean up plastic pollution in waterways and along beaches, said Bonta, a Democrat who is running for reelection this year. He announced the investigation with an ocean backdrop at Dockweiler State Beach in Southern California.

Petrochemical companies have ramped up plastics production as the use of fossil fuels is gradually replaced by renewable energy, he said. About 1.5 million tons of plastic produced globally on an annual basis in the 1950s. The amount is now more than 300 million tons annually.

The Center for Biological Diversity called Bonta's investigation "a crucial step," but said plastic and its production is ultimately incompatible with a healthy planet. "We have to stop producing plastic junk," the group said in a statement. □



A migrant waits on the Mexican side of the border after United States Customs and Border Protection officers detained a couple of migrants crossing the US-Mexico border on the beach, in Tijuana, Mexico, Jan. 26, 2022.

Associated Press

GOP-led states ask courts to stop changes to U.S. asylum cases

ABILENE, Texas (AP) — Republican efforts to stop the Biden administration from changing how asylum claims on the U.S. border are handled widened Thursday as Texas and Arizona asked courts to block new procedures that could decide asylum cases in months, instead of years.

The lawsuits pile onto an already busy week over immigration policy. The U.S. Supreme Court is questioning a rule that forces some asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico, and a federal judge in Louisiana temporarily stopped the phaseout of asylum restrictions that were put in place at the

start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biden administration estimated last year that it would need to hire 800 more employees for asylum officers to handle about 75,000 cases a year. Without more money and new positions, it is unclear how much impact the move will have at first. □

Survey: Americans increasingly see China as a threat

By **DAVID RISING** and **KEN MORITSUGU**

BEIJING (AP) — Americans are increasingly seeing China as a world superpower and a threat, though growing numbers perceive it more as a competitor than an enemy, according to a survey released Thursday.

The Washington-based Pew Research Center said that negative views of China reached a new high, with 82% of Americans having either somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable views of the country, a 6 percentage point increase from last year.

About two-thirds of U.S. adults said that China's influence in the world is getting stronger, and two-thirds also consider China's power and influence a major threat to the United States.

At the same time, the proportion of respondents who saw China as an enemy has dropped since January. Currently, 62% of Americans see China as a competitor and 25% as an enemy, while in January



President Joe Biden meets virtually with Chinese President Xi Jinping from the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, on Nov. 15, 2021.

Associated Press

54% chose competitor and 35% said enemy — almost exactly the same as the prior year.

The shift may be a temporary one influenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Laura Silver, a senior researcher at Pew, said it's likely that the war has changed how people de-

fine what is an enemy, as opposed to a competitor. The survey of 3,581 people was taken from March 21 to 27, about a month into the Russian invasion. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.

The opposite shift occurred in the share of Americans

who called Russia an enemy. Some 70% of Americans now see Russia as an enemy, up from 41% in January, according to Pew.

"With a clearer sense that what Russia is doing demarcates it as an 'enemy,' there has been a corresponding shift in thinking China is more of a compet-

itor," Silver said.

On the official level, however, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin calls China the U.S. military's leading long-term challenge and the U.S.-China relationship has become more strained on many levels since the start of President Joe Biden's term in January 2021.

Biden has been placing more emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region and has repeatedly criticized China for military provocations against Taiwan, human rights abuses against ethnic minorities and efforts to squelch pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong. U.S. officials also have expressed concern about signs that China is increasing the size of its nuclear arsenal, although it remains far smaller than America's. With China so far refusing to condemn the invasion of Ukraine, Beijing's partnership with Moscow was identified as the most serious problem for the U.S., with 62% of people polled saying it was. □

U.S. tries to seize yacht in Fiji. But which oligarch owns it?

By **NICK PERRY**
Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A judge in Fiji is due to rule Tuesday on whether U.S. authorities can seize the luxurious superyacht Amadea — worth some \$325 million — which has been stopped from leaving the South Pacific nation because of its links to Russia.

But a vital question remains over which oligarch really owns the Amadea. Only one of the two possible candidates faces sanctions.

Is the real owner Suleiman Kerimov? That's what the U.S. claims.

Kerimov, an economist and former Russian politician, was sanctioned by the U.S. in 2018 for alleged money laundering and has faced further sanctions from Canada, Europe and Britain after Russia invaded Ukraine. Kerimov made a fortune investing in Russian

gold producer Polyus, with Forbes magazine putting his net worth at \$14.5 billion. Or is the real owner Eduard Khudainatov? That's what defense lawyers claim.

Khudainatov is the former chairman and chief executive of Rosneft, the state-controlled Russian oil and gas company. Crucially, Khudainatov currently does not appear to face any sanctions, unlike many oligarchs and people with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin who have been sanctioned since the war began.

As with many superyachts, determining the real ownership of the Amadea is difficult due to the shadowy trail of trusts and shell companies. On paper, the superyacht is registered in the Cayman Islands and owned by Millemarin Investments Ltd., also based in the Cayman Islands.

Defense lawyers have claimed in court that Mil-

lemarin Investments Ltd. (sometimes spelled Millemarine) is the legal owner of the vessel and that the company is linked to the real, or beneficial, owner, Khudainatov. But U.S. authorities have claimed that behind all the various fronts, the real owner is Kerimov.

On April 19, after the yacht had sailed into Fiji from Mexico, the High Court in Suva ordered that the Amadea not leave Fiji until the merits of the U.S. warrant to seize the vessel were determined. Perhaps reflecting the question over ownership, the court later ordered Fijian prosecutors to amend an original summons which named just Kerimov to also include Millemarin Investments Ltd. as a second respondent to the case.

For now, the yacht continues to sit in a Fijian harbor with its crew of about 25 rotating on and off the vessel, while a police officer re-



The superyacht Amadea is docked at the Queens Wharf in Lautoka, Fiji, on April 15 2022.

Associated Press

mains on board to ensure it stays put.

According to Boat International, the Amadea is 106 meters long and was built in 2017. It features a stainless steel albatross that extends off the bow and weighs more than 5 tons, a live lobster tank in the galley, a 10-meter (33-foot) pool, a hand-painted Pleyel piano and a large helipad.

The U.S. Embassy in Suva said in a statement that the

U.S. was acting with allies and partners around the world to impose costs on Russia because of its "war of choice."

"We continue to ratchet up the pressure on Putin's oligarchs and we are working with allies and partners to go after corrupt gains from some of the individuals closest to Putin, no matter where they are held around the world," the embassy said. □

Israeli PM's family receives death threat and bullet in mail

By JOSEF FEDERMAN

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's teenage son has received a death threat and bullet in the mail, Israeli officials said Thursday, the second such warning against the Israeli leader's family this week. The threats have come at a time of deep political divisions in Israel. In a major speech on Wednesday night marking Israel's Holocaust memorial day, Bennett had spoken out against the polarization in Israel, urging citizens not to let internal divisions rip society apart.

Israeli police said that both incidents were being investigated, but gave few other details, including where the items were sent and who might have sent them. Bennett has been the target of fierce criticism from Israel's hard-line right wing since forming his governing coalition last year. In 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish ultranationalist opposed to his peacemaking efforts with the Palestinians.

Bennett's government is made up of eight parties from across the political spectrum, including religious nationalists, centrists and an Islamic party. It is



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and his wife Gilat take part in the ceremony marking Holocaust Remembrance Day at Warsaw Ghetto Square at the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem, Thursday, April 28, 2022.

Associated Press

the first Arab party to be part of a governing coalition.

These parties have little in common beyond their shared animosity to former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

They have agreed to put aside many of their differences while focusing on common ground, such as the economy, managing the coronavirus crisis and spending on education and social services.

Netanyahu, now the opposition leader, has worked hard to undermine the coalition.

Critics have accused Bennett, who leads a small, religious nationalist party, of abandoning his core hard-line beliefs. One member of his Yamina party was sanctioned this week as a "defector" for repeatedly supporting the opposition in hundreds of votes. Another member of his party recently resigned from the

coalition, leaving the fragile alliance without a parliamentary majority.

Bennett formed the coalition last June after four inconclusive elections that underscored the fissures in society over key issues as well as the polarizing effects of Netanyahu's 12-year rule.

In Wednesday's speech, coming on one of the most solemn days of the year, Bennett implored the nation to put aside its differ-

ences.

"My brothers and sisters, we cannot, we simply cannot allow the same dangerous gene of factionalism dismantle Israel from within," Bennett said.

That speech came a day after his family received a bullet in the mail for the first time. The episode prompted his 17-year-old son Yoni to express his sadness in an Instagram post.

"It's just sad to see that real people write such horrible things," he said. "To think that he lives and breathes like me but has a brain that was created by the devil is crazy."

Bennett is a former top aide to Netanyahu, and Yoni is named after Netanyahu's older brother, who was killed in a famous 1976 Israeli commando raid while rescuing a hijacked airplane in Uganda.

An Israeli official familiar with the matter confirmed on Thursday that the second threatening letter and bullet had been sent to Yoni Bennett. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Police have imposed a gag order on their investigation, and officials declined to say whether there were any suspects. □

Africa sees rise in measles as pandemic disrupts vaccines



A baby receives a polio vaccine during the Malawi Polio Vaccination Campaign Launch in Lilongwe, Malawi, on March 20, 2022.

Associated Press

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA

Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP)

— Africa is seeing a surge of outbreaks of preventable diseases as a result of

disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organization said on Thursday.

The continent recorded a 400% increase in measles,

to more than 17,000 cases between January and March, compared to the same period last year, Dr. Benido Impouma, a WHO expert in Africa, told a press briefing.

Two years of disruptions by the coronavirus pandemic have had "major effects on the provision of routine health services, with immunization being seriously affected" in many countries, he said.

Twenty-four countries confirmed outbreaks of polio last year, four times more than in 2020.

Last year 13 countries reported new outbreaks of yellow fever, rising from nine in 2020 and three in 2019, according to WHO figures.

"The rise in outbreaks of other vaccine-preventable diseases is a warning sign," Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa, said in a statement. "As Africa works hard to defeat COVID-19, we must not forget other health threats. Health systems could be severely strained not only by COVID-19 but by other diseases."

The continent of 1.3 billion people has reported 11.4 million COVID-19 cases, including 252,000 deaths, according to figures from the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Although the virus had been trending downwards since January, the WHO reported a rise in cases Thursday driven by a doubling

of infection rates in South Africa, the African country most affected by the pandemic.

Impouma, the WHO official, said that in the wake of the pandemic the agency seeks to support countries to scale up COVID-19 vaccinations as well as routine immunization services.

"The same is true for routine immunization as for COVID," said Helen Rees, executive director of a reproductive health and HIV institute at South Africa's University of the Witwatersrand. "There is the direct health ... problem, but there's this spinoff in terms of adversely affecting poor development and contributing to poverty, which is absolutely critical for our region." □

Mexico president proposes dramatic electoral reforms

By **MARIA VERZA**

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's government on Thursday proposed a dramatic overhaul of the nation's electoral system and the agency that oversees it — one of the country's most trusted institutions. It would reduce the size of Congress and state legislatures while having the federal elections board chosen by voters, potentially adding a higher degree of politics to what has been an independent body.

The proposal also would reduce federal funding of political parties and spending on elections in general — a repeated target of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has often feuded with the National Electoral Institute.

The proposals presented by López Obrador and several members of his cabinet would create a new federal elections authority to replace the institute, as well as eliminating similar state-level bodies.

"There is no intention of imposing a single party," López Obrador said. "What we want is that there is



Mexican President Andres Manuel Obrador smiles as people applaud after the playing of the national anthem at the end of an event where he delivered a speech on economic figures, in Mexico City, Tuesday, April 12, 2022.

Associated Press

a true democracy in the country and that electoral frauds end ... to leave a true democratic state established."

But the path for what will surely be a controversial reform package would be difficult. López Obrador's party and its allies do not have the two-thirds ma-

majority in Congress required to make constitutional changes. The main opposition parties have already said they oppose such changes.

Another major constitutional reform proposed by the president, to shake up the energy sector, fell well short of the votes needed

last week.

López Obrador appeared to acknowledge that the proposed reforms are unlikely to pass. He called on the Congress to study each element of the proposal, make the public aware and then decide. He said it was his responsibility to present it "even if it's not ap-

proved."

López Obrador has spent decades battling electoral authorities. He considers himself a victim of electoral fraud on multiple occasions, though it was the National Electoral Institute that confirmed his landslide presidential victory in 2018. The proposals would reduce the number of legislators in the lower chamber of Congress from 500 to 300 and senators from 128 to 96 by eliminating at-large lawmakers. Those are not directly elected by voters, but appear on party lists and get seats based on their party's proportion of the vote.

Political parties would only receive public funding during campaigns rather than yearly, as now. Rules against officials and agencies promoting their programs during campaign seasons would be eased. Currently, even many government websites are inactivated during campaigns. López Obrador's administration argues that the changes would save Mexico \$1.2 billion and allow citizens to select honest people to run elections. □

20 dead, thousands flee homes as gangs battle in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)

— Criminal violence in Haiti worsened this week, with fighting among gangs in part of the capital chasing thousands from their homes and killing at least 20 people, including children.

Haiti's Civil Protection Agency said the fighting began Sunday in four neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, north of the international airport. At least a dozen homes were burned down and many of those who fled initially took shelter in the yard of a local mayor's office.

The eruption comes amid a spike in violence and kidnappings as gangs grow more powerful and seek to control more territory amid the power vacuum following the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. The situation has angered and frustrated Haitians,

who are demanding action from Prime Minister Ariel Henry's administration, which is receiving international help to boost an underfunded and understaffed police force.

A family of eight, including six children, was among those killed since Sunday, authorities said Wednesday. Schools and businesses in the area remain closed as thousands of families with children are camping in a park near a local mayor's office.

"They need water, food, supplies," said Jean Raymond Dorcelly, who runs a small grassroots community organization. "They had to leave with nothing in their hands."

He said that the neighborhood is usually quiet and that his child often plays in the park now turned into a makeshift outdoor shelter.

"I can see kids crying because they're hungry and families don't have anything to provide to them," he said, adding that needs were growing as the fighting continued. "I don't know what it's going to be like tomorrow."

Authorities said that along with the dead, two dozen people had been injured in the violence, and that one bullet hit an empty United Nations Humanitarian Air Service helicopter stationed near the airport.

"The conflict is likely to escalate in the coming days, leading to further casualties and new population migrations," the Civil Protection Agency said. Officials warned that main roads leading to Haiti's northern region could be cut off as a result of the fighting.

Gang violence in the Mar-



A motorcycle taxi driver carries clients past a demonstration against increasing violence in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

Associated Press

tissant community in southern Port-au-Prince already has cut off access to the country's southern region, which is trying to recover from last year's deadly earthquake.

The Martissant violence displaced thousands of

families last year that have spent months in overcrowded, unhygienic government shelters in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. It wasn't immediately clear where the newly displaced families would be staying. □

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Papillon: the butterfly effect of magnificent food

PALM BEACH — Do you remember the film “Papillon” starring Steve McQueen? Papillon restaurant is the island’s example where ‘life imitates art.’ The décor, especially the restrooms, was inspired by the movie. For more than a decade this restaurant has built a reputation with the fusion of classic French cuisine, Dutch and Caribbean flavors. Welcome in the world of wonders where ambience, taste and service come together and you feel you are being welcomed in the home of the owner and her team.



“We find it really important that our guests have fun; can relax while listening to live music while their taste buds are being tickled by France, The Netherlands and the Caribbean. We offer a unique fusion of dishes and a night not to forget,” says owner Tina. She points out that all Covid-protocol is in place here, they are very keen on hygiene and offer outside dining on a cozy, elegant terrace with social distancing in place and right on the high-rise strip.

Fresh oysters, caviar and wild boar
You are on vacation, life is to enjoy! If you want something special, a different flow than the usual then Papillon is the place to go. Foodies are in heaven here with classic French dishes such as Foie Gras, Frog Legs, fresh Oysters coming in on a weekly basis from Holland, Escargots, Dover Sole à la Meunière flown in from Europe and filleted at the table, Duck Breast seared on the skin, roasted and braised Lamb in Balashi beer and slow braised Wild Boar Shank. Do not leave without trying the exclusive rec-



ommendation: Caviar! All of this combined with an extensive wine list from around the world makes Papillon a must-do on your Aruban vacation.

Let the music play!

We will give you another reason to visit: on Monday's and Friday's the famous Marisela who enchants you with her acoustic performance accompanied by percussion only; on Thursday's and Saturday's you can enjoy the tunes of live sax player Jairo and on Sunday's and Tuesday's Jose Herrera will enchants you with his keyboard talent. The musicians interact with the guests, requests can be send in, the live tunes definitely add to the experience.

Vegetarian vibes present

Impressive vegetarian/vegan dishes are set up especially for the guests by the chef and Meredith from Vegan Aruba. “We offer vegan choices that are really good and tasty. Our daily soup is always vegan too.” What are you waiting for, make sure to pay a visit to this elegant yet laid-back restaurant while on Aruba. You are most welcome!

Papillon Restaurant is located at The Village across the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino and within walking distance of all other major hotels.

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Post Aruba emits its second stamp series for 2022 named 'Flamingo'

ORANJESTAD - On April 29, 2022, Post Aruba N.V. emits a stamp series named 'Flamingo'.

The photographs used for this emission, which consists of four stamps, were taken by Mr. Gregory M. Peterson, and the First Day Cover envelope and stamp were designed by Mr. Elvis Tromp.

About the flamingos:

There are four flamingo species distributed throughout the Americas (including the Caribbean), and two species native to Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Flamingos usually stand on one leg with the other tucked beneath the body. They are capable flyers, and flamingos in captivity often require wing clipping to prevent escape.

Young flamingos hatch with grayish-red plumage, but adults range from light pink to bright red due to aqueous bacteria and beta-carotene obtained from their food supply. A well-fed, healthy flamingo is more vibrantly colored, thus a more desirable mate; a white or pale flamingo, however, is usually unhealthy or malnourished. Captive flamingos are a notable exception; they may turn a pale pink if they are not fed carotene at levels comparable to the wild.



Flamingos filter-feed on brine shrimp and blue-green algae as well as insect larvae, small insects, mollusks and crustaceans making them omnivores. Their bills are specially adapted to separate mud and silt from the food they eat, and are uniquely used upside-down. The filtering of food items is assisted by hairy structures called lamellae, which line the mandibles, and the large, rough-surfaced tongue.

Flamingos are considered very noisy birds with their noises and vocalizations ranging from grunting or growling to nasal honking. Vocalizations play an important role in parent-chick recognition, ritualized displays, and keeping large flocks together. Variations in vocalizations exist in the voices of different species of flamingos.

Flamingos are very social birds; they live in colonies whose population can number in the thousands. These large colonies are believed to serve three purposes for the flamingos: avoiding predators, maximiz-

ing food intake, and using scarce suitable nesting sites more efficiently.

This stamp series and First Day Cover envelope are available at all the Post Office locations, namely in Oranjestad and San Nicolas, and also the Post Aruba

online stamp shop www.postaruba.com/stamp-shop

For more information on the "Flamingo" stamps series please visit the Facebook page: Aruba Stamps or Webpage: postaruba.com/philatelic/

First Day of Issue / Eerste Dag van Uitgifte

post aruba Nr. 254

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Travellers' Choice 2020

The Aruba Tourism Authority honor loyal visitors on the island at Bucuti and Tara Beach Resort



ORANJESTAD - Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Distinguished Visitors of Aruba.

The Distinguished visitor certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 10 years and more consecutively.

The honorees were the lovely **Mr. Michael & Mrs. Debbie Mancino** from the state of Connecticut!

This lovely couple stated that

they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches, its variety of restaurants that Aruba has to offer, the exceptional treatment at the Bucuti and Tara Beach Resort, and Aruba's warm and friendly people whom have become like family to them.

Ms. Richardson together with the representatives of the Bucuti and Tara Beach Resort presented the certificate to the honorees, handed over some presents and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as their home-away-from-home. □

The Aruba Tourism Authority honor loyal visitors on the island at Divi Phoenix

ORANJESTAD - Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors with their distinctive certificates. These certificates are a way to say "Masha Danki" for continuously choosing Aruba as a favorite vacation destination. The titles are as following: 10+ years "Distinguished Visitor", 20+ years "Goodwill Ambassador" and 36+ years "Emerald Ambassador".

The honorees were **Mr. Vincent & Mrs. Cristine Papasodero** from New York who were honored as

Goodwill Ambassadors.

This symbolic honorary title is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba for the 10-20-36 consecutive year mark.

This lovely couple stated that they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, its cleanliness, its variety of restaurants and Aruba's warm and friendly people whom have become like family to



them.

Ms. Richardson together with the representatives of the Divi Phoenix presented the certificate to the

honorees, handed over some presents and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as their home-away-from-home. □



ORANJESTAD - Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor one of Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as a Goodwill Ambassador of Aruba.

The Aruba Tourism Authority honors a loyal visitor on the island at The Mill Resort

The Goodwill Ambassador certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 20 years and more consecutively.

The honoree was **Mrs. Donna Rutledge** who has been visiting Aruba for over 21 years consecutively!

This lovely lady from Massachusetts, U.S.A. stated that she loves the island of Aruba very much, especially for its year-round sunny

weather, nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, its variety of foods and Aruba's warm and friendly people whom have become like family to her.

Ms. Richardson together with the representatives of The Mill Resort & Suites Aruba presented the certificate to the honoree, handed over some presents and also thanked her for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as her home-away-from-home. □

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Millennial Money: Kick-start your online clothing resale gig

By DALIA RAMIREZ of Nerd-Wallet

With the recent rise of resale apps like Depop and Poshmark, the idea of selling old clothes online is becoming more fashionable. Many people have turned clothing resale into a lucrative side gig or even a full-time job, gaining thousands of followers and making dozens of sales per week.

The secondhand-clothing market is projected to more than triple by 2030, according to a 2021 study by reselling platform Mercari and research firm GlobalData, as more fashion enthusiasts clean out their closets and search thrift stores to find valuable pieces to resell.

But whether you have a collection of band T-shirts or office attire, finding success on these platforms takes time and effort. Before diving into your closet, there are a few things to know.

YOU SET YOUR PRICES

Unlike consignment and resale shops, you can price items yourself on an online platform. Before listing a piece of clothing, look it up on multiple platforms to find out what it's currently selling for. Depending on age, condition and brand, prices can vary widely.

You can also take advantage of direct messaging to negotiate with buyers and use features on apps like Depop and Poshmark that let you accept offers and create multi-item dis-



A UPS driver enters a United Parcel Service store with packages in Jackson, Miss., Monday, July 26, 2021.

Associated Press

counts.

"Sales can be sporadic," says Andres Castillo of Los Angeles, who sells rare designer pieces through Depop, eBay and Instagram under the name Debonair Vintage.

With rare or high-value items, it may take a while to find the right buyer, especially if you're looking to break even or make a profit.

THERE'S A BIG TIME COMMITMENT

"I treat (reselling clothes) like my job," says Eve Perez, a full-time student in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, who sells under the name Fitsfinesse and was featured in Teen

Vogue in 2021 for her Depop success. She responds to messages daily, on top of taking product photos, sewing custom pieces, and packaging and shipping orders.

Communicating clearly with first-time buyers is essential: "If you don't build that relationship, then you won't get sales and returning customers," she adds.

Although you have control over the prices, reselling online takes much more time and energy than selling to consignment stores. According to Depop, sellers who list consistently — around 15 items per week — sell more over time.

"It takes a lot of time and dedication," says Castillo. Top-notch sellers have to learn to take eye-catching photos, understand shipping rates, negotiate over text, and research brands and trends to make the most of their inventory.

OVERHEAD COSTS ADD UP

Yes, you can set your prices — but there are a few overhead costs to factor in. Online resale platforms charge commission fees, plus additional fees for shipping through the platform or accepting payments through a processor like PayPal. Depop takes 10% of every sale and eBay takes 15%; Poshmark takes \$2.95 for

items under \$15 and 20% for items over \$15. PayPal, which integrates with Depop, Poshmark and eBay, charges another 3.49% plus 49 cents per transaction for payment processing.

On top of that, you'll need to pay for packaging, label printing and possibly storing inventory including bins, hangers and shelves. Top sellers also recommend adding a personal touch in shipments, like free stickers, small accessories or a thank-you note. When all those costs add up, you may find that only higher-value items are worth listing.

You can cut costs by reusing shipping mailers and boxes, and printing labels at your local FedEx or UPS store instead of purchasing a label printer. Or, reduce shipping costs for buyers by bundling several items into a single shipment, which can motivate buyers to purchase more from your shop.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT IS A PRIORITY

The most successful online resellers have one thing in common: a strong personal brand. Finding your niche and building a loyal following is essential to long-term success on a resale platform.

"It's like Instagram, but for selling," says Perez, who focuses on curating a consistent aesthetic and marketing her shop on social media platforms like TikTok. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 44 Exorbitant

1 Start of "celery" or "cymbal"

6 Sidewalk eateries

11 Sung story

12 Conspicuous

13 Ranch animal

14 Painter Rivera

15 Reduced amount

17 Aura

18 Like the Sahara

20 Writer Morrison

22 Take in

23 Greek resort island

26 Molten rock

28 Trig topic

29 Diplomat's base

31 Outlaw

32 Bounce back

33 Make finer

34 Sister of Amy, Jo, and Meg

36 Subpoena, e.g.

38 Quartet doubled

40 Spare

43 Filmdom's Garbo

45 More confident

46 Painful spasm

DOWN

1 Urgent call

2 Make a choice

3 Making a recovery

4 Cornered

5 2006 Pixar film

6 Atlantic catch

7 French city

8 Resentful

9 Therefore

10 Hide away

M	I	L	K	F	A	B	L	E	S
O	D	I	N	E	L	A	I	N	E
D	O	N	A	E	L	D	E	S	T
E	L	E	V	A	T	O	R		
	G	E	L	Y	A	W	L	S	
P	A	R	S	E	S	P	I	E	L
A	L	A				N	E	O	
G	O	P	R	O	A	L	E	R	T
E	T	H	E	R	C	O	G		
	T	E	L	E	G	R	A	M	
C	A	J	O	L	E	J	A	N	E
A	V	E	R	S	E	A	P	E	S
M	A	T	T	E	S	M	E	W	S

Yesterday's answer

16 Pig's place

18 High point

19 Be nomadic

21 Sanction

23 Use a pestle

24 German chancellor

25 Dis-patched

27 Jungle chopper

30 Boar's mate

33 Foot, to fathom

34 Marshy spots

35 Beige

37 Musical symbol

39 La Brea stuff

41 Early auto

42 Clumsy one

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11						12			
13						14			
		15			16		17		
18	19				20	21			
22				23				24	25
26			27			28			
29					30			31	
		32					33		
34	35				36	37			
38				39		40		41	42
43						44			
45						46			

4-29

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

4-29

CRYPTOQUOTE

D U T B P B J G E R M T O R P P R J G

N S I G E . H T R R V B I C P B P D M J

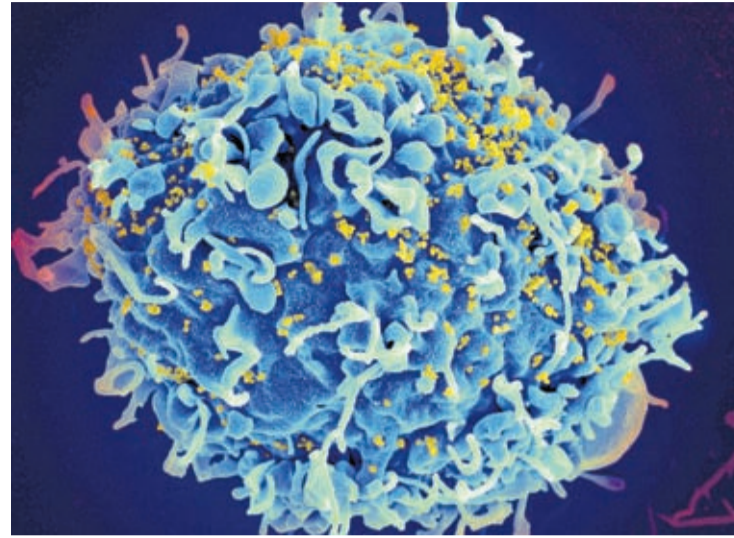
S O G S Q G E R V R D V P D I V .

N B W B I C N R N S T L D I V V R J B T R .

— G . J . R P B S G

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: SERVICE TO OTHERS IS THE RENT YOU PAY FOR YOUR ROOM HERE ON EARTH. — MUHAMMAD ALI

Increased infectious disease risk likely from climate change



This electron microscope image made available by the U.S. National Institutes of Health shows a human T cell under attack by HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Associated Press

BY DREW COSTLEY
AP Science Writer

Climate change will result in thousands of new viruses spread among animal species by 2070 — and that's likely to increase the risk of emerging infectious diseases jumping from animals to humans, according to a new study.

This is especially true for Africa and Asia, continents that have been hotspots for deadly disease spread from humans to animals or vice versa over the last several decades, including the flu, HIV, Ebola and coronavirus.

Researchers, who published their findings Thursday in the journal Nature, used a model to examine how over 3,000 mammal species might migrate and share viruses over the next 50 years if the world warms by 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), which recent research shows is possible.

They found that cross-species virus spread will happen over 4,000 times among mammals alone. Birds and marine animals weren't included in the

study.

Researchers said not all viruses will spread to humans or become pandemics the scale of the coronavirus but the number of cross-species viruses increases the risk of spread to humans.

The study highlights two global crises — climate change and infectious disease spread — as the world grapples with what to do about both.

Previous research has looked at how deforestation and extinction and wildlife trade lead to animal-human disease spread, but there's less research about how climate change could influence this type of disease transmission, the researchers said at a media briefing Wednesday.

"We don't talk about climate a lot in the context of zoonoses" — diseases that can spread from animals to people, said study co-author Colin Carlson, an assistant professor of biology at Georgetown University. "Our study ... brings together the two most pressing global crises we have."

Experts on climate change

and infectious disease agreed that a warming planet will likely lead to increased risk for the emergence of new viruses.

Daniel R. Brooks, a biologist at University of Nebraska State Museum and co-author of the book "The Stockholm Paradigm: Climate Change and Emerging Disease," said the study acknowledges the threat posed by climate change in terms of increasing risk of infectious diseases.

"This particular contribution is an extremely conservative estimate for potential emerging infectious disease spread caused by climate change, said Brooks. Aaron Bernstein, a pediatrician and interim director of The Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said the study confirms long-held suspicions about the impact of warming on infectious disease emergence.

"Of particular note is that the study indicates that these encounters may already be happening with greater frequency and in places near where many people live," Bernstein said. Study co-author Gregory Albery, a disease ecologist at Georgetown University, said that because climate-driven infectious disease emergence is likely already happening, the world should be doing more to learn about and prepare for it.

"It is not preventable, even in the best case climate change scenarios," Albery said. Carlson, who was also an author on the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said we must cut greenhouse gas and phase out fossil fuels to reduce the risk of infectious disease spread.

Jaron Browne, organizing director of the climate justice group Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, said the study highlights climate injustices experienced by people living in African and Asian nations. □

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Assistant Director
Xiomara Arends

Editors
Pilar Flores
Richard Brooks

Sales
Sulaika Croes

Classifieds
classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection
accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website
Juan Luis Pinto

Columnists
Anthony Croes

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800
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3 Bed Ocean view \$13,000

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Review: Liam Neeson kills down 'Memory' lane

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

"Memory" is an interesting title for the latest Liam Neeson thriller. Do you remember the last Liam Neeson thriller? Or the one before that? Who was it that got took in that one? It began getting hard to tell these films from one another years ago, and yet they've kept coming. "Key & Peele" only seems more prophetic for making the actor's name plural. "Liam Neesons" is right. He contains, and kills, multitudes.

"Memory," which opens in theaters Friday, doesn't much alter the formula but makes for a brutal and bleak variation on the Liam Neeson theme. It casts a broader, more interwoven noir tapestry set around the Texas borderlands, with an ensemble cast including Guy Pearce, Monica Bellucci, and Ray Stevenson. If you come to "Memory" hoping Neeson is going to growl one-liners like "Commit THAT to memory!" or "If memory serves me correctly, you're toast!" — you may be surprised to find a movie less interested in



This image released by Open Road Films/Briarcliff Entertainment shows Scot Williams, left, and Liam Neeson in a scene from "Memory."

Associated Press

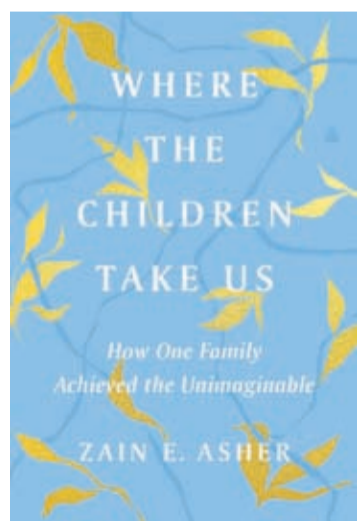
such action-star heroics than it is something murkier and more cynical. Does that make it good? Well, I wouldn't go that far. The filmmaking, by Martin Campbell, the British director of thrillers both glossy ("Casino Royale") and gritty ("Edge of Darkness"), lacks the texture and sense of place that could have made "Memory" (much

of which was shot in Bulgaria) something more than a throwaway. But the performers — Neeson and particularly Pearce — don't phone anything in. Neeson plays an El Paso, Texas, assassin named Alex Lewis who tilts more toward bad guy territory than most of the actor's protagonists. Of course, though, Alex has a moral compass that won't

tolerate certain things. He smashes one guy's head against the bar for his rude behavior toward a prostitute. And he won't kill kids. When Alex refuses to kill a 13-year-old girl (Mia Sanchez), a crime syndicate seeking to cover up a child trafficking ring comes after him. At the same time, Alex is beginning to experience early onset Alzheimer's.

That, curiously, only seldom affects his mission to protect the girl and bring down the syndicate, but it does make Alex even bolder; his life is fading away, anyway. At the same time, the FBI agent Vincent Serra (Pearce) is trying to bring down the ring and is watching over the very same teenage girl, but his higher-ups keep pushing him toward other cases. Pearce's very presence in a memory-loss thriller is a nod to "Memento." In one scene, when Neeson writes clues on his forearm to help himself remember, you half expect Pearce to grab the pen and give him a few pointers. There's much that's familiar in "Memory," a remake of the 2003 Belgian thriller "Memory of a Killer." Alex and Vincent form a loose partnership as two men trying to carry out one act of justice in a place without it. If the Liam Neeson thriller has cast Neeson as a kind of globe-trotting vigilante and defender of justice in a fallen world, it's fitting that he should make his way to the U.S.-Mexican border. □

Review: News anchor Zain Asher writes uplifting memoir



This cover image released by Amistad shows "Where the Children Take Us: How One Family Achieved the Unimaginable" by Zain E. Asher.

Associated Press

By **DOUGLASS K. DANIEL**
Associated Press

In recounting her family's struggle to carry on after her father's unexpected death, Zain E. Asher has written a handbook for

hope when none seems possible. Asher's face is familiar around the globe as the anchor of CNN International's "One World." So is her brother's, actor Chiwetel Ejiofor, the star of the Oscar winner "12 Years a Slave" and praised for writing and directing the Netflix film "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind." Their sister, Kandibe, a medical doctor, and brother, Obinze, an entrepreneur, have made marks in their own fields. However, the star of Asher's memoir, "Where the Children Take Us," is their mother. Obiajulu Justina Ejiofor was raising a family in London when a car accident killed her husband, Arinze, a medical student, and critically injured son Chiwetel, then 11. With a baby on the way, she had to cope with the loss of her

childhood sweetheart, running a neighborhood pharmacy and, most importantly, the care of their young children. Grief-stricken and exhausted, even with help from relatives, she feared she was failing them. But Obiajulu had faced challenges before. As a child, she lived through political and ethnic division during Nigeria's bloody civil war, then moved with Arinze to London at 18 with little more than a desire to build a life together. Working at a laundry, she was inspired by another Nigerian woman to explore further possibilities. Soon, Obiajulu was setting her sights on earning a pharmacy degree, obtaining a loan and opening her own business, all thanks to the first "uplifter" in her new life. In the wake of tragedy, Asher's mother became her

family's uplifter by wielding the firm hand of a parent who would not allow her children to let themselves down. Even after long days at the pharmacy, Obiajulu would oversee their studies, engage them in a dinner-time book club, and put the baby to bed. She established the commitment to get ahead in the world through education and intense discipline. Asher was often the only Black child in her classes, at times feeling unwanted as an outsider in terms of race and class. At age 9 her mother sent her to live in Nigeria with her grandparents to learn strength and resilience the old-fashioned way. That "crash course in survival" lasted nearly two years. Cleaning the yard, scrubbing the toilet, balancing buckets of water from a riv-

er a mile from their village, Asher mastered what she calls "the art of back-breaking endurance." At school in Nigeria she learned how to gain the respect of her classmates and teachers. She returned to London better able to adapt to adversity and exclusion. Asher was pushed to visit Oxford University at 13, her mother pointing to students and telling her, "That could be you someday." When her studies fell short of Oxford-worthy grades because of the distractions of television and telephone, Obiajulu took away the TV set and installed a pay phone in the hallway. In time Asher was accepted into Oxford — and later to Columbia University to study journalism. The lessons from her mother helped her forge a successful career in TV news. □

Tougher challenge awaits defending champ Bucks in 2nd round

By STEVE MEGARGEE

AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — After a bumpy beginning to their postseason, the defending champion Milwaukee Bucks rediscovered their championship form in plenty of time to dispose of the Chicago Bulls in their opening-round series.

They likely won't make it past the next round unless they're playing at this level right from the start.

The Bucks next face the sizzling Boston Celtics, who swept the Brooklyn Nets in the opening round. Their Eastern Conference semifinal matchup begins Sunday in Boston.

"They're the hottest team in the league," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said Wednesday after the Bucks' 116-100 series-clinching Game 5 victory over the Chicago Bulls. "You'd have to be in a cave to not know they're winning every game. They're the best defense in the league, got great players, great coaching."

The Bucks don't expect to have three-time All-Star forward Khris Middleton available for the start of the series.

Middleton sprained the medial collateral ligament in his left knee in Game 2 of the Bulls series and said Friday he hoped to return in two weeks. That timeline would signal a potential re-



Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo gets past Chicago Bulls' Ayo Dosunmu during the first half of Game 5 of their NBA playoff basketball game Wednesday, April 27, 2022, in Milwaukee. Associated Press

turn in Game 3 of the Celtics series May 7 in Milwaukee.

The Bucks twice rallied from a 2-0 deficit to win a playoff series during their title run last season, but they can't count on that happening again. That means the Bucks must try to continue performing as well without Middleton as they did in the final three games against the Bulls.

Milwaukee didn't look par-

ticularly sharp in a 93-86 Game 1 victory and a 114-110 Game 2 loss, but the Bucks won the next three games by an average of 23.3 points.

The Bucks took command of the series by relying on their defense.

"Obviously we don't know how many points we're going to score with Khris — one of our best scorers — being out," Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo said. "In

order for us to win games, we've got to play defense. We've got to get down, have that individual pride, try to keep the guy in front of us from scoring. And at the end of the day, we've got to do it together."

Defense had been a relative weakness for Milwaukee during the regular season, but it was no problem at all against the Bulls. The Bulls exceeded the 100-point mark in just one

of the five games and shot below 40% three times.

"Team defense was great this whole series," Bucks guard Wesley Matthews said. "That's what we're going to need going into Boston."

Milwaukee also needs Antetokounmpo and the players surrounding him to play as well as they did against Chicago.

Antetokounmpo averaged 28.6 points, 13.4 rebounds and 6.2 assists in the Bulls series. Bobby Portis had four double-doubles and collected a career-high 17 rebounds in Game 5. Grayson Allen had two games of 20-plus points. Jrue Holiday, Brook Lopez and Pat Connaughton each had one game with at least 20 points.

But that came against a Bulls team that was missing Lonzo Ball since January and didn't have either Zach LaVine or Alex Caruso in Game 5. The Celtics are much more dangerous.

The Celtics' sweep of the Nets continued the momentum they established the last few months of the regular season. Boston was below .500 in late January but won 28 of its last 35 regular-season games to finish 51-31 and earn the NBA's No. 2 seed.

"It's going to be a battle," Matthews said. "They're a good team. But so are we." □

Ruud defeats Molcan to reach BMW Open quarterfinals

MUNICH (AP) — Casper Ruud took his time finding his rhythm as he beat Alex Molcan 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals at the BMW Open on Thursday.

Molcan built a 4-0 lead in the first set as Ruud struggled with his serve, but the Norwegian clay-court specialist fought his way back and broke Molcan at 4-4 in the decider before serving out the match.

"It was not the best start for me but I was able to find my rhythm a little more as the match went on," Ruud said. "(Molcan is) a tough player and good confi-

dence for me to get these types of wins."

The 23-year-old Ruud said he was especially pleased to be playing well at the comparatively high altitude of Munich as preparation for similar conditions at the Madrid Open next week.

It was Ruud's opening match in Munich after getting a first-round bye. At a career-high No. 7, the Norwegian is the highest-ranked player left in the draw after Alexander Zverev's surprise loss to 18-year-old Holger Rune on Wednesday.

Ruud will face eighth-

seeded Botić van de Zandschulp in the quarterfinals after the Dutch player defeated Egor Gerasimov 6-2, 6-3.

Germany's Oscar Otte managed the surprise of the day by beating Reilly Opelka of the United States 7-6 (4), 6-2. Opelka had two set points in the first set but Otte saved them both before taking the set to a tiebreaker.

Otte's quarterfinal opponent is Alejandro Tabilo, who was leading 6-2, 2-6, 4-1 when Hugo Gaston retired from their second-round match. Otte cruised past Tabilo 6-0, 6-3 when



Casper Ruud of Norway returns the ball to Alex Molcan of Slovakia at the ATP tennis tournament in Munich, Germany, Thursday, April 28, 2022. Associated Press

they played last week at the Serbia Open. □

Bad baseballs? New York Mets angry after rash of HBPs

By **DAVID BRANDT**
AP Sports Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — New York Mets pitcher Chris Bassitt has a theory about why his bat-swinging teammates have turned into targets at the plate during the season's first month.

Bad baseballs.

"The MLB has a very big problem with the baseballs. They're bad," he said Tuesday. "Everyone knows it. Every pitcher in the league knows it. They're bad. They don't care. MLB doesn't give a damn about it. We've told them our problems with them and they don't care."

It's understandable Bassitt wants to protect his teammates. The Mets have been hit by pitches 19 times through their first 20 games this season — including three times against the Cardinals on Tuesday night — which is by far the most in the league.

They've also been hit by a lot of balls in the head and neck area, which can be particularly dangerous.

But a look at MLB-wide statistics shows a complicated picture that's likely affected by April's usual cold weather and random chance. The league's HBP rate is actually down slightly from last season. The Pittsburgh Pirates played their first 17 games without anyone getting hit by a pitch.

Still, that doesn't change Bassitt's main thesis.

Are the baseballs really "bad"? Maybe "inconsistent" is the better word.

"They're rubbed up differently by different people in different climates in different places," Braves pitcher Collin McHugh said. "I understand the challenge of trying to get a consistent product under all those different variables. There's no doubt that the ball you get in the first is going to be



New York Mets' J.D. Davis doubles over after being hit by a pitch during the eighth inning of a baseball game against the St. Louis Cardinals Wednesday, April 27, 2022, in St. Louis. Davis left the game.

Associated Press

different than the ball you get in the eighth and from batch to batch.

"Sometimes the ball feels small in your hand. Sometimes they feel big. Very often they're real slick, dusty slick. So you see guys out there rubbing it. They're really not trying to rub anything onto the ball, they're trying to rub that layer of dust off the ball because it just feels a little slick."

Last year, MLB cracked down on pitchers who used sticky substances — remember Spider Tack? — to try to get a better grip on baseballs. These days, umpires routinely check pitchers' gloves and hands as they're coming off the field. The crackdown was met with tepid response. It's true pitchers can use sticky substances to make the ball spin faster to get a harder break on off-speed pitches. But it also helped pitchers

know where the ball was going, particularly in cold weather.

MLB proposed during collective bargaining that hitting a batter on the head or neck result in an automatic ejection irrespective of intent, which the union rejected, a person familiar with the negotiations said. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because neither side has disclosed that detail. MLB also proposed a discussion of additional discipline for cumulative batters hit, the person said.

MLB has tried to standardize its baseballs and made humidior usage mandatory this season. The humidior is used to try to get baseballs to behave in a similar fashion, whether the game's being played in Colorado's thin air or New York or Atlanta.

The league is also provid-

ing pitchers with two options of rosin bag, which received positive reviews during spring training but have been less effective at improving grip in colder weather, pitchers say.

Over the years, there have also been complaints about the seams on baseballs. Generally speaking, the higher the seams, the easier it is to grip the ball. Let's just say it's a work in progress.

"Sometimes, pitchers just, the ball feels like a little bit of like a cue ball," Giants manager Gabe Kapler said. "And there's not always like a lot of rhyme or reason for it. Sometimes, it has to do with the cold, and sometimes it's just, you pick the ball up and it feels a little foreign."

Tigers pitcher Michael Fulmer said he sometimes alters his pitch mix on the mound in tough conditions because he's not sure where the ball will go. But almost any MLB pitcher will agree that the ability to pitch inside is paramount to success.

"Obviously nobody's trying to hit anybody on purpose in the head or on the neck, shoulder area — nobody,"

Fulmer said Wednesday. "But with these balls the way they are right now, like last night, it was very easy to let one fly up and in. I'm really trying to hold onto this ball and make sure I don't let one go."

MLB said it continues to look for answers.

"MLB is always concerned about keeping hitters safe from dangerous pitches," an MLB spokesman said. "We closely analyze trends in the game and have active conversations with our players and coaches to address concerns. Through April 26, leaguewide statistics show hit-by-pitch rates and wild pitch rates are down relative to previous seasons. However, one Club has been hit more than twice as often as the league average so far in 2022, which is something we will continue to monitor."

That team is the Mets.

The drama continued on Wednesday afternoon after Mets third baseman J.D. Davis was hit by a pitch on the foot and had to leave the game.

An inning later, Mets pitcher Yoan López threw high and tight to Cardinals star Nolan Arenado, who reacted angrily.

The benches cleared. Arenado and Cardinals first base coach Stubby Clapp were ejected. Mets slugger Pete Alonso was tackled during the scrum.

And so it goes.

Alonso — who was hit in the head with a pitch on Tuesday — wasn't particularly concerned about the Cardinals' intent after Wednesday's benches-clearing incident. Just the results.

He compared the situation to a scary car accident he had during spring training.

"Whether if it's on purpose or an accident, guys are still getting hit in the head," Alonso said. "Doesn't matter what the intent is. Like someone T-boned me, right? Oh, it was an accident. Oh, you still flipped someone's car over. Right? So doesn't matter where the intent is.

"The fact of the matter is that it's still happening." □

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